



August, 2011

Called by God and sent by the Living Christ, we the Northwest Regional Christian Church intentionally engage with one another rejoicing in our diversity and shared gifts, deepening our spiritual life, building true community, acting courageously in ministry and mission, and sharing God's good news with a fresh voice and a new song. We seek to "do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God." (Micah 6:8)

Hi! This month we are exploring "Building True Community," one of the central goals of our denomination.

—Wahhab Baldwin

BUILDING TRUE COMMUNITY

Mission has both an introverted and an extroverted dimension. As Rabbi Hillel said a century before Jesus, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am not for others, what am I? And if not now, when?"

If we do not care for our own community, we will not have the strength, the confidence, and the unity to do a good job of caring for the world around us. That is why it makes sense to begin our thoughts of mission with building true community, just as Dick Hamm did in his *2020 Vision for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*. This was adopted in our denomination's mission statement: "To be a faithful, growing church, that demonstrates true community, deep Christian spirituality and a passion for justice."

In our Regional Mission Statement, we say, "We foster intentional relationships grounded in the love of Christ in all aspects of Regional life: between individuals, congregations, ecumenical and interfaith partners." There are a number of practical ways we can do this within our congregations and throughout the region.

DEVELOPING OPEN COMMUNICATIONS

Many church boards are run using an informal version of Roberts Rules of Order, taking votes on items to be decided. It may be time to revisit this model of decision making. We are here to listen to and carry out God's will. At the same time, we are the hands and feet through which God works in this world. So instead of debate, discussion of a topic might be better handled by beginning with prayer, then inviting each person to share what they hear God saying, and listening to each one with an open heart and mind. Decisions might be made by consensus. There are different models of consensus, and decisions do have to be made, but the idea is that if there is still strong disagreement on a subject, we have not yet heard one another and God's voice clearly enough yet.

These are new skills, and they take practice. At Lake Washington Christian Church, we held a series of five study groups to learn and practice these skills. The exercises were developed based on the text *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges*, by Otto Scharmer, in which he speaks of four levels of listening, and develops an approach towards dialog, based on having an open mind, open heart, and open will.

HOSPITALITY

Every church attempts to practice hospitality, and most churches seem friendly, but hospitality is a spiritual discipline in which we can always go deeper. It seems to me that part of our challenge is recognizing our own blind spots. I was impressed that Lake Washington Christian Church has undertaken a whole series of activities to create a fragrance-free zone in the sanctuary for people with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity. They use no scented cleaning supplies, and have an air filter that runs during the service. They even moved the Christ Candle to the opposite side of the church because of fumes given off when it is extinguished.

Being hospitable to our fellow members is as important and being hospitable to the stranger. Not just welcoming those who show up, but reaching out and inviting are part of hospitality. I think we could especially invite other churches, including other Disciples churches, to join with us in various activities.

WORSHIP AND MUSIC

This of course is the heart of our community building as a congregation. A challenge we all face is how to shape worship and music to appeal to new generations without discomfiting the older generations. One study I read suggested that the most effective approach for music is for each service to include music from each of the last four 20-year periods, so that each generation feels included. If your church has found an approach that works, let me know about it!

REMEMBER THE REGION

As Disciples churches, we appreciate that each congregation makes its own decisions. But we are part of a larger community—the community of communities making up our Region, our

denomination, and the entire body of Christ. It is important for us to share news from the regional and denomination levels in our churches, to be active and intentional in supporting the region and the denomination financially, and to create and take advantage of opportunities for having our members participate in regional and denomination events and to visit and invite our sister congregations to share in events and worship. The cross-pollination which that creates greatly enriches our life as church.